



MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY OF SERVICE

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** ★★ ★

Host a Stand Down event for Homeless Veterans



The Challenge



According to a count on a January night in 2011, there were 67,495 homeless Veterans. And an estimated 144,842 Veterans spent at least one night in an emergency shelter or transitional housing program in a recent year. Stand Downs seek to address this issue through one- to three-day events providing services to homeless veterans such as food, shelter, clothing, health screenings, Veterans Administration (VA) and Social Security benefits counseling, and referrals to a variety of other necessary services, such as health care, housing, employment, and substance use

treatment.

Stand Downs are collaborative events coordinated between local VAs, other government agencies, and community agencies serving the homeless.

This toolkit will help you to address this community need by:

- Explaining associated terms
- Highlighting helpful resources
- Sharing effective planning steps
- Outlining project management tips
- Providing ideas for communicating your message
- Sharing tips for reflection and reporting



Prepare

Learn Associated Terms

Before you jump-start the planning phase of your project, be sure you know the terms associated with the work you are about to do.

- **Stand Down Event:** The term “Stand Down” comes from times of war, when exhausted soldiers requiring brief periods of rest were removed from field combat to a safe, secure place. Veterans experiencing homelessness still live in conditions that mimic combat situations, living on the streets and often near exhaustions, without the services they need to survive. A Stand Down Event provides the access to services that will help veterans get to a safer and more secure place.
- **Vietnam Veterans of San Diego:** This group designed the first Stand Down event in 1988 over a three-day period at one site. They designed the event to bridge physical and psychological barriers between service providers and recipients.



Identify a Location

To plan a Stand Down, get more information about the [Homeless Veterans Initiative](http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/about_the_initiative.asp)

(http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/about_the_initiative.asp) and contact your [local homeless veterans' coordinator](http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/HCHV_Sites_ByState.pdf)

(http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/HCHV_Sites_ByState.pdf). Also contact local social service agencies that may already be providing some service for people who have served in the military. The veterans' coordinator and social services will be able to let you know what are the most pressing needs facing homeless vets in your community.

Browse Helpful Resources

- [Homeless Veteran's Initiative](http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/about_the_initiative.asp) (http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/about_the_initiative.asp)
- [Local homeless veteran's coordinator](http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/HCHV_Sites_ByState.pdf) (http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/HCHV_Sites_ByState.pdf)
- [Step-by-step manual on how to do a Stand Down](http://www.vvsvd.net/pdf/sdmanual-2.pdf) (<http://www.vvsvd.net/pdf/sdmanual-2.pdf>)

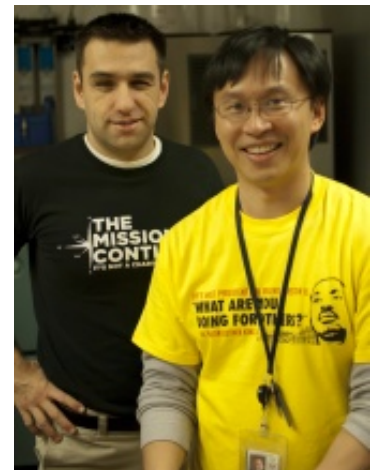


Plan

A successful group effort requires a motivated team whose members agree upon clearly defined tasks, set reachable goals, and act with inspiration and purpose.

Build a Team

- Start off planning with folks you know, and ask them to tell others to join your efforts.
- Meet regularly, especially as MLK Day approaches.
- Assign concrete tasks to keep everyone motivated and on track.
- As you work, talk about the parallels between Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s impact and your own.



Set Goals

Build your planning team

Whether you are a team of few or many, a planning team will help you execute all aspects of your project. Below are some roles your planning team can take on. If it's only you: reach out to volunteers past and present to fulfill these roles:

- Project Development
- Volunteer Recruitment and Management Team
- Communications Team
- VIP/Leadership Engagement Team
- Fundraising Team
- Event Team

- Set goals, such as number of people trained, items supplied, and folks pledging to pass along what they've learned to others.
- Record these goals and make sure you can meet them. Ensure you and your team choose goals you can all agree on.

Plan Your Project

There are a number of ways that you can plan a Stand Down event in your community. Here are a few ideas for planning tasks to complete:

- Give careful consideration to who will take on a vital leadership role. A grass roots veterans' group or service organization is ideal. Providing veteran-to-veteran commitment is crucial to establishing credibility with veterans experiencing homelessness.
- Take the time to assess the needs of veterans experiencing homelessness in your community as well as the capabilities of the community to host an event. What specific services are available to veterans in your community? Is your event space available for longer than a day? This will help you determine what type of Stand Down event to hold, and what services to offer
- Reach out to local shelters and providers for people experiencing homelessness who can help you collect specific information regarding veterans experiencing homelessness in your area. Ask these agencies what services veterans experiencing homelessness most often request.
- [Incorporate learning into any service you do \(node/292\)](http://www.eitc.irs.gov/ptoolkit/awarenessday/) by sharing information about the issues your project addresses and about Dr. King's work and teachings as it relates to the issue.
(<http://www.eitc.irs.gov/ptoolkit/awarenessday/>)

Raise Resources and Equipment/Supplies

Involving and engaging kids

Whether kids show up to volunteer or they unexpectedly arrive with parents who can benefit from your service, have activities that they can do such as:

- Carry light objects
- Decorate cards, lunch bags, or placemats
- Serve refreshments to the adults hard at work
- Organize or tidy the project spaces
- Watch a film about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

See [Engaging Kids in Service \(node/296\)](#) for more on kid-friendly service projects.

What supplies will you need to promote the Stand Down event in your community?

- Seek financial and in-kind donations from businesses for the supplies you'll need to run your project
- Solicit funds from team members and/or others to purchase items you need for successful MLK Day
- Purchase the necessary supplies prior to the service day so they're ready to go on MLK Day.

Manage your Project

Think about implementing the following tasks to manage your Stand Down service project. These resources and ideas will help you complete a successful event.

- Utilize to do lists for the days leading up to, day of and post event day.
- Make sure team leaders or coordinators are at the site early, the site is set up, and they are ready to greet volunteers or community members as they arrive.
- Even if some volunteers will be doing door-to-door distribution of materials, it is important that the group start off the day together and review what you are trying to accomplish.
- Officially welcome everyone and talk about the purpose of the event: providing this Stand Down Event in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Organize volunteers into different work teams. For example, have different people greeting participants, handing out refreshments, responding to questions, or distributing materials.
- Build moments of reflection into your planned activities. Share stories and words from Dr. King and about any insights you've gained so far [about the connection between your service and Dr. King's teachings \(node/292\)](#).
- Document the day and be sure to have volunteers sign a photo release form.
- Conduct your event, offering continuous encouragement to participants.



Communicate Your Message

Communication is a key part of any service project. You will need to communicate about:

- Getting volunteers to help you plan or implement your service activity
- Raising funds or in-kind donations for your project
- Informing potential participants who might benefit from your service



Publicize your event using a combination of low-tech outreach, traditional, and social media.

Low-tech Outreach

- Post flyers in public places
- Use community bulletin boards
- Ask area businesses to spread the word (e.g. flyers at registers or posters in store windows)
- Make announcements at schools, churches, or civic groups

Traditional Media

- Invite the news media (print and broadcast) to report about your upcoming event or to attend and share information about accomplishments. Use a [press release \(node/252\)](#) or a [media advisory \(node/252\)](#).
- Make follow-up phone calls to the news media
- Place free ads in the community affairs section of your local papers

Digital and Social Media

- Promote your project, and document the day, through Facebook, Tweets, and pictures
- Reach out to a local blogger and ask if he/she might cover the event
- After your event, [share your service story \(http://mlkday.gov/share/index.php\)](http://mlkday.gov/share/index.php).
- Submit your event to local online calendars and LISTSERVs



Share Impact

Assess and Reflect

Host an official debriefing meeting for team members after the service day. Ask the team to reflect on the following questions:

- Examine the goals you set for yourselves. Which ones did you meet? Which exceeded your expectations? And which goals did you not quite reach?
- What did you accomplish?
- Who did your work impact in your community?
- What went well and what could be improved for next time?
- What Stand Down resources or outreach methods would you use again in the future? Which ones would you forego?
- Consider what doing this work on MLK Day, in particular, meant to your community.
- Go back to your initial investigation into the local problems you elected to help tackle and ask more questions. For example: If you hosted a single Stand Down event, what else could you provide to veterans experiencing homelessness beyond access to services? What other organizations or programs in your community could you collaborate with to offer continuing support?



Share Your Story

We know you might not like to brag, but please do! You may inspire others to organize a Stand Down event for veterans once they hear what you accomplished. Share your service accomplishments with:

- Volunteers, financial and in-kind supporters and constituents groups; the accomplishments could accompany a thank you letter
- The media; thank all media who reported on your planned activities or covered you service project along with sharing accomplishments from the project and any plans for the future
- The Corporation for National and Community Service; learn about multiple ways to [share your story](http://www.serve.gov/?q=site-page/share) (<http://www.serve.gov/?q=site-page/share>)

23 reads

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